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New Report Examines Drug Rehabilitation Efforts in Utah *Rise in Jail Population Rate May have Consequences for Treatment Efforts*

(December 13, 2018) -- Today Utah Foundation releases [*Rethinking Rehabilitation: Improving Outcomes for Drug-Addicted Offenders in Utah*](#). The report explains efforts to address addiction within the context of the justice system in Utah and explores alternative approaches for people struggling with substance use disorders. It also sets forth policy guidance for future action.

The issue is critical because effective rehabilitation programs for offenders can yield significant cost savings to the criminal justice system and the wider public and reduce recidivism rates. One recent federal study found a five-fold return to the public on investments in drug rehabilitation programs for offenders. Treatment programs have also been shown to reduce overdose deaths after release from prison.

Among the report's key findings are that efforts to reduce the state prison population appear to be bearing fruit. However, the populations of local jails in Utah are rising, and local facilities often lack the drug treatment programs found in state prisons.

Other key findings include:

- Investments in drug rehabilitation for offenders can yield significant savings to taxpayers in the long run.
- In 2016, Utah's state prison population rate of 201 per 100,000 state residents was seventh lowest in the nation. However, Utah's local jail incarceration rate of 357 per 100,000 was the 15th highest in the nation.
- From 2014 (the year before Utah's criminal justice reform) to 2016 (most recent year available), Utah's prison population decreased by 12%. At the same time, the jail population increased by 6%.
- The shift from state prisons to local jails appears to be due at least in part to efforts to downgrade drug offenses from felonies to misdemeanors.
- The increasing ratio of jail inmates to state prison inmates raises concerns about drug rehabilitation. Of the 26 county jails in Utah, only 14 have substance abuse programs, and those vary in content and structure.

- The implementation of the Justice Reinvestment Initiative increased state support for substance abuse treatment centers across Utah. As a result, between 2016 to 2017 alone, there was a 21% increase in admissions to substance use treatment for criminal offenders.
- Currently, the only pre-booking diversion programs in Utah are specifically designed for individuals with mental health disorders. In other words, there are no pre-booking diversion programs for individuals with substance use disorders.
- Drug courts are the most commonly used post-booking diversion tool that provide an alternative to incarceration for individuals that demonstrate a high need for substance treatment. There are drug courts in all eight judicial districts in Utah.
- There are two substance abuse treatment programs for men at Utah’s state prisons and one for women, all of which use therapeutic communities – an approach shown to reduce recidivism and drug relapse.
- From 2015 to 2017, a statewide recidivism risk and mental health needs screening process implemented in county jails showed that half of inmates required further assessment for a substance use disorder. As of 2018, however, only two counties have continued to use the screening process due to a lack of funding.

Utah Foundation concludes the report with the following guidance for policymakers:

- Given the potential return on investment from high-quality programs for drug offenders, state and local governments should continue to work to leverage robust and effective rehabilitation programs.
- The increasing ratio of local jail inmates to state prison inmates deserves close examination to ensure that the shift does not diminish the prospects for drug rehabilitation among offenders.
- State and local officials should work to provide a continuum of rehabilitation services across the criminal justice system at both the state and local levels.
- Policymakers should closely monitor the unfolding experiences of local jurisdictions in other states experimenting with pre-booking diversion programs to determine their potential and identify possible pitfalls to be avoided.
- Policymakers should also create a system for evaluating the performance of Utah’s drug courts on a comprehensive basis, with an eye toward identifying successes that can be replicated and weaknesses to be avoided.
- State and local officials should consider continuing to support a risk and needs screening process in county jails.

Utah Foundation President Peter Reichard highlighted the importance of examining Utah’s prison population alongside its local jail population and to identify gaps in incarceration-based and community-based treatment services. “The potential return on investment to the public suggests policymakers have a duty to ensure a robust and effective treatment network is in place at both the state and local levels,” Reichard said. “This means both bolstering the programs we know work and

monitoring the progress of more experimental efforts nationally to determine whether to deploy them in Utah.”

The full report is available at utahfoundation.org.

Utah Foundation is a non-partisan public policy research group. Founded in 1945, its mission is to promote a thriving economy, a well-prepared workforce and a high quality of life for Utahns by performing thorough, well-supported research that helps policymakers, business and community leaders, and citizens better understand complex issues and providing practical, well-reasoned recommendations for policy change.

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